

## Culture



**Marianne GULLESTAD, *The Art of Social Relations: Essays on Culture, Social Action and Everyday Life in Modern Norway*, Oslo: Scandinavian University Press (Distributed by Oxford University Press), 1992; 251 pages, \$60.95**

George Park

Volume 14, Number 1, 1994

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1083274ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083274ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

### ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

Park, G. (1994). Review of [Marianne GULLESTAD, *The Art of Social Relations: Essays on Culture, Social Action and Everyday Life in Modern Norway*, Oslo: Scandinavian University Press (Distributed by Oxford University Press), 1992; 251 pages, \$60.95]. *Culture*, 14(1), 94–95. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083274ar>

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1994

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**érudit**

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

a sort of feedback loop with available cultural streams which they in turn modify so that the streams come to privilege the patterns so generated. North Balinese concerns are such that they generate a range of common behavior patterns in otherwise widely different communities.

I have some questions regarding this process of generation. Firstly, it seems to me that these traditions or ways of knowing or cultural streams do more than provide means of interpretation, as for instance when the modern state (which is part of one of these streams) coercively privatizes the land previously held communally in a village. The concerns linked with the practice of widely different access to power are not *explicitly* explored in this book. Secondly, I have difficulties understanding the concept of generation of patterns itself, though I can *see* the existence of these patterns and I fully agree with Barth that they must be generated from practice. Could it be that the circle Barth uses to explain his concept is too limited? If I understand it correctly, the process involves several layers internal to the person (after all any process of interpretation entails a conversation with oneself, that is, it is a cognitive process — though this is implied in the book which draws on theories of knowledge), and several layers of external interactions. And then there is yet the anthropologist's internal and external interactions leading to the representation of these patterns.

These criticisms should not, however, detract from the qualities of *Balinese Worlds*. Barth's complex thought appears to be bound for a fruitful future.

Marianne GULLESTAD, *The Art of Social Relations: Essays on Culture, Social Action and Everyday Life in Modern Norway*, Oslo: Scandinavian University Press (Distributed by Oxford University Press), 1992; 251 pages, \$60.95.

By George Park

Ex-Memorial University

This book is, and is more than, a gathering of fugitives. The nine assembled essays represent work published since 1986, discussed at length in an introductory chapter outlining the author's aims and premises. The reader learns at once to expect a single-minded focus. We get snapshots of "society seen crosswise" — the everyday and private lives of mainly urban Norwegians, mainly around home or from a

home base interacting with peers. Methodologically, she is a champion of holism. It is accordingly a pleasure to report that the several essays do comprise a single whole, and one greater than its parts. Some redundancy remains from the preparation of each essay for independent publication, but the amount is modest, and in compensation any chapter can be taken by itself.

The quality of the argument is more reminiscent of Simmel than Goffman, but the old fundamentalism, the global pretensions of a Simmel (e.g. on gender difference or the ontology of individualism) are missing. While sharing the same unremitting concern with manners, Gullestad never tries for Goffman's charming superficiality. The result is not exactly a focus on values, though each essay explicitly revolves about a Norwegian "cultural category" or value. Students of values have never enjoyed Goffman's privileged right to pluck examples from thin air. When you have to prove the prevalence of a human foible, not just realize it in the concrete, it is hardly enough just to frame a likely set of character traits and illustrate. The trouble is that anthropologists in the field are seldom in position to do justice, as Gullestad can for her own culture, to the microsociology of everyday existence. Exploring character values, we are taught here, requires not just fieldwork but direct observation of the kind which allows exploration on what Edmund Leach, in a moment of lofty inspiration, called "the ground."

Gullestad's list for the Norwegians she has interviewed and observed can be found in several versions. The problem is getting through the day's voyage from sleep to sleep without capsizing. As with Sumner and his *mores*, the analyst must look for the verbal category which explains an action or moral strategy as self-evidently right. Thus we have a set of conditions any individual is expected to recognize as dangerous, and a corresponding set of safe havens. The home must be kept safe at all costs. A person must have access to peace and quiet. Threats to one's self-sufficiency or independence, to the security of one's domestic arrangements, to one's self-control must be foreseen and avoided. Trouble comes of careless involvements with others, of expecting proper treatment from persons socially unlike one's self and one's known social equals. These are themes which allow of endless, quiet exploration, of pointed theorizing well below Merton's middle range; and speculation as to the range of their applicability.

A major contribution of this work is to put together (in English, between two covers) an anthropological commentary on a Nordic culture which introduces the reader to a line of study and a literature (in Norwegian, or else quite scattered) properly ethnographic — not essentially historical, not sector-analytical, not problem-applied, not grand-theoretical. Along with her holism, Gullestad favours grounded theory which doesn't try to fly, diffident, not self-enamoured deconstruction, and what she calls "commuting" between fact (the field) and interpretation of either the Clifford Geertz or the David Schneider sort (the armchair). That we get no hard sells is owing in part to her keeping to her "commuter" role: the premiss, refreshing in our time, is that our kind of knowledge rests better on thoughtful observation of everyday life than it can rest on hard, soft, or sense *data* (a Latin plural meaning "givens").

How far might this line of study continue? Nothing in the book sheds much light on currents in Norwegian society; on ways people of working or bourgeois status, failing to opt out of danger, drop out; or on favoured ways of engaging in conflict. Little Norway probably produces more cogent social research aimed at self-assessment than all of continental Europe or North America. Most is not available to linguistic outsiders but very little is privatized, as research here is, by professional and academic coteries unwilling even to cross departmental lines. The possibilities for thoughtful "crosswise" anthropology, leaning on published work but resting on firmer ground, look better there.

Alan SMART, *Making Room: Squatter Clearance in Hong Kong*, Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, Centre of Asian Studies Occasional Papers and Monographs, No. 102, 1992; 228 pages, HK\$130.

By Peter Lomas

Multicultural Family Centre Research Clinic,  
Vancouver, B.C.

The author's proclaimed objective in this study of a squatter settlement in a densely populated urban area in Kowloon, Hong Kong, is an examination of the processes of squatter clearance, taking into account the importance of the wider economic system and state policies. He persuasively argues that state policies prompt the emergence and removal of

squatter settlements and that policies in turn are influenced by responses to clearance. The core of the publication is an account of the concerns and strategies of residents of a few areas of the Diamond Hill district facing actual or potential clearance during the mid 1980s, but this is viewed against the backdrop of economic forces and the colonial administration's housing policies.

The author provides some historical background on land use in the New Kowloon area from the assumption of British control in 1898 to the late 1980s, referring to official records, memoirs of former bureaucrats, unpublished reports and items from the local English language press. This is presented in the context of a general discussion of major demographic and economic changes in Hong Kong as a whole. His consideration of the history of Diamond Hill and the social groupings that have played a major part in structuring the social fabric of this area is an interesting contribution, but readers keen to understand the dynamics of the process of clearance and resettlement might wish that his examination of the actual circumstances surrounding the clearance of one area could be expanded.

Readers hoping for an ethnography of the Diamond Hill area, or part of it, will find short sections on community groupings, limited discussion of the power structures within the settlement and intriguing but perhaps necessarily undeveloped commentary on the role of Triads in community decision making and the management of housing stock, but no comprehensive description or analysis of the social structure of this large and important squatter community. Although some useful case studies are presented to illustrate the range of positions adopted by residents towards clearance, it is regrettable that the author, who notes that he lived in the area for several months, does not provide more detail on the lives and strategies of his neighbours. He does offer very interesting statistical data from a survey of his own and those of others but presents disappointingly little ethnographic material. The classification of dialect groups (Fukien, Chui Chau) as ethnic groups raises some questions, and the author skips over an opportunity to examine relations between squatters from different dialect groups.

The author deals with theoretical concerns in urban studies, critiquing extant positions in the first chapter and returning to these considerations periodically in later chapters, paying particular attention to the way in which the state, in this case the Hong